

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 2922

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CB, US, PINT, PINS, OREP, MILI

SUBJECT: CALL ON MARSHAL LON NOL WITH SIR ROBERT THOMPSON

1. I TOOK SIR ROBERT THOMPSON TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT LON NOL AFTERNOON FEB 15. I AVAILED MYSELF OF THIS OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE TWO POINTS TO THE MARSHAL:
(A) HE SHOULD STOP QUARRELLING WITH CINC/FANK SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ, SOMETHING HE HAD ENGAGED IN EARLIER IN THE DAY. THIS WAS A TIME, I SAID, FOR THE KHMERS TO STAND TOGETHER AND THEY COULD SORT OUT THEIR DIFFERENCES AT A LESS CRITICAL TIME. (CLEARLY THE PRESSURE IS GETTING TO THE KHMERS AND THEY ARE STARTING TO POINT FINGERS AT EACH OTHER AS TO WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR FAILURES.)
(B) WHEN THE AMERICAN LEGISLATORS COME TO PHNOM PENH, THE PRESIDENT SHOULD NOT HOST HIS TYPICALLY ELABORATE LUNCHEON FOR THEM, WHICH WOULD BE COMPLETELY MISUNDERSTOOD AND WOULD CREATE A BAD IMPRESSION. INSTEAD, I WAS THINKING MORE IN TERMS OF BOX LUNCHESES AND PROJECTING AN ATMOSPHERE OF AUSTERITY AND MILITARY DETERMINATION. THE MARSHAL AGREED.

2. I WILL NOT REPORT IN DEPTH ON THE REST OF DISCUSSION WITH SIR ROBERT, AS I UNDERSTAND LATTER WILL CABLE REPORT ON HIS FINDINGS HERE AFTER HIS RETURN TO SAIGON. HOWEVER, I WOULD LIKE TO NOTE THAT THE MARSHAL WAS QUITE A BIT LESS COHERENT ON THIS OCCASION THAN WHEN I SAW HIM THE PREVIOUS DAY. HE
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APPEARS TO BE LIVING IN A DREAM WORLD. FOR EXAMPLE,

HE SAID IN REPLY TO SIR ROBERT THAT SOME DAY IN THE FUTURE "THOSE WHO BESIEGE US WILL BE THE BESIEGED." THE MARSHAL FORESAW A TIME WHEN ANTI-COMMUNIST MOVEMENTS WOULD DEVELOP IN THE COMMUNIST HELD AREAS OF CAMBODIA WHICH, AS THEY GREW, WOULD CAUSE TROUBLE FOR THE COMMUNISTS AND BESEIGE THEM IN THE MANNER THE COMMUNISTS ARE NOW LAYING SIEGE TO PHNOM PENH. SIR ROBERT AND I LISTENED TO THIS IN SILENCE.

3. THE MARSHAL WAS ALSO IN ONE OF HIS MOST UNCOMPROMISING MOODS, STRESSING THE SANCTITY OF THE KHMER REPUBLIC'S CAUSE OF FIGHTING INDO-CHINESE COMMUNISM, AND THAT HE SAW NO PROSPECT FOR AN EARLY COMPROMISE SETTLEMENT. THOSE ON THE OTHER SIDE WHO WANT PEACE CANNOT EXPRESS THEMSEVLES, HE SAID, AND THE HARD-LINE HANOI-DOMINATED KHMER ROUGE DO NOT WANT ANYTHING LESS THAN A MILITARY SOLUTION TO THE KHMER CONFLICT. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, "THE REPUBLICAN KHMERS WILL FIGHT ON, EVEN IF THEY HAVE TO DO SO WITHOUT AMERICAN ASSISTANCE," HE ASSERTED.

4. COMMENT: I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THE MARSHAL WAS PUTTING ON THIS ACT OF "GOTTERDAMMERUNG" FOR SIR ROBERT OR WHETHER HE REALLY BELIEVES THIS LINE. IN ANY CASE, I INTEND TO TALK WITH THE MARSHAL NEXT WEEK ABOUT WHAT HE MAY WISH TO SAY TO THE CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION. IF HE RANTS AND RAVES AS HE DID YESTERDAY WITH SIR ROBERT, I THINK HE WILL SERIOUSLY JEOPARDIZE CAMBODIA'S CHANCE OF RECEIVING SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE. HOPEFULLY, THE AUGMENTED CIVILIAN AIRLIFT, WHICH IS RECEIVING PUBLICITY NOW, WILL CALM HIS NERVES AND MAKE HIM SOMEWHAT MORE RATIONAL. IT WAS CERTAINLY A LOT EASIER TO WORK WITH A LOGICAL, PRAGMATIC STATEMAN LIKE SOUVANNA PHOUMA THAN WITH THE MYSTICAL, INARTICULATE LON NOL.
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